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TAGS: [BK](#) [PREL](#) [YI](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: BOSNIA: SERBIAN PM KOSTUNICA IN BANJA LUKA;  
RHETORIC TONED DOWN

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¶1. (SBU) Serbian Premier Vojislav Kostunica visited Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina January 19 to attend the signing of a 646 million EUR contract to sell Republika Srpska,s (RS) telecommunications operator to Telekom Srbija. In addition to the Telekom deal, Serbian and RS officials also signed a contract to build a 9.5 million EUR Sava River bridge connecting Bosnia and Serbia near the Serbian town Raca. Speaking to the press following the signing, RS Premier Milorad Dodik said that the day,s activities were proof that the RS-Serbia Agreement on Special Parallel Relations was no longer merely declarative, but was increasingly substantial. OHR Sarajevo is currently examining the legality of the Raca bridge. OHR informed Dodik last year that, because the opening or construction of new border crossing facilities is a state-level competency, the RS must coordinate the initiative with the state government. It is unclear whether Dodik did so.

¶2. (U) According to the Banja Luka daily &Glas Srpske,8 when asked to comment on recent statements by Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic connecting the final status of Kosovo with the fate of Bosnia and Republika Srpska, Premier Kostunica reiterated that absolute respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement was the firm policy position of all the institutions of Serbia. Kostunica added that Serbia respects both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia, as well as Bosnia,s two-entity constitutional structure.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Post repeatedly has warned RS officials to avoid rhetoric that connects the Kosovo status process with the fate of the RS. In that light, it was encouraging that Dodik exercised more self-restraint than he has in the past in discussing Kosovo publicly. (We made clear to Dodik prior to the visit that he must moderate his rhetoric and refrain from comparisons of the RS and Kosovo.) Kostunica's comments were also a dramatic improvement from his remarks at a January 12 election rally in Belgrade which generated much consternation here (Reftel). Nonetheless, we are not sanguine about the prospects for a responsible political dialogue on Kosovo from Bosnian politicians. Ambassador will meet with Dodik in Banja Luka on January 25 and make clear, once again, the unacceptability of many of his statements about referenda on RS independence, etc. END COMMENT.

MCELHANEY